

FLAGS IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish National Cemetery System (NCS) policy for displaying flags in VA national cemeteries.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This directive prescribes policy related to the display, handling, storage and disposition of flags in national cemeteries.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Field Operations (401), NCS, is responsible for the material contained in this directive. The cemetery directors are responsible for carrying out the procedures contained in the related handbook.
4. **RELATED HANDBOOK:** NCS Handbook 3220, Flags in VA National Cemeteries.

5. RESCISSIONS

a. NCS M40-2, National Cemeteries - Administration, Operation and Maintenance, dated May 1, 1984, paragraphs:

- (1) 3.05 - U. S. Flag and Cemetery Flag Pole
- (2) 6.07 - Interment Flag
- (3) 11.04 - Memorial Day Grave Decorating Flags
- (4) 11.09 - Avenue of Flags
- (5) 22.12 - Issuance of United States Flags Authorized for Burial or Memorial Purposes

b. NCS Administrative Issues:

DMA Circular 40-79-03 - Issuance of United States Flag for Burial or Memorial Purposes, May 7, 1979

c. NCS Policy Letters:

- (1) Quality Control of Interment Flags, October 1, 1990
- (2) United States Flags in the National Cemetery System, July 1, 1991
- (3) Flying of the POW/MIA Flag in National Cemeteries, July 6, 1992
- (4) Display of the POW/MIA Flag in National Cemeteries, October 7, 1992

Jerry W. Bowen
Director, National Cemetery System

Distribution: RPC 4014
FD

FLAGS IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

1. **PURPOSE:** This directive provides policy for VA's National Cemetery System's (NCS) Flags in VA National Cemeteries, formerly contained in M40-2. The statutory authority for this directive is stated in title 38, United States Code, sections 2400(a) and 2404(a).

2. **POLICY:**

The NCS's flag policy is based on Public Law 94-344, called the U. S. Flag Code, title 38 United States Code, section 2403(c), and title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, sections 1.9 and 1.10. This directive implements the NCS policy of demonstrating appropriate respect related to the display, handling, storage and disposition of flags in national cemeteries.

3. **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

NCS, Office of Field Operations, Field Programs Service (401A) will ensure that individual Area Office Directors and Cemetery Directors understand their responsibilities pertaining to display and handling of flags in VA National Cemeteries.

4. **REFERENCES:**

- a. Public Law 94-344, Federal Flag Code
- b. VA Pamphlet 27-75-1, United States Flag for Burial or Memorial Purposes
- c. 38 CFR 1.9, The Department of Veterans Affairs Official Seal and Distinguishing Flag
- d. 38 CFR 1.10, The United States Flag for Burial Purposes
- e. Public Law 103-38, National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- f. National POW/MIA Recognition Day (by Senate Joint Resolution)

FLAGS IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish National Cemetery System (NCS) procedures for displaying flags in VA national cemeteries.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This handbook prescribes procedures related to the display, handling, storage and disposition of flags in national cemeteries.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Field Operations (401), National Cemetery System, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook.
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVE:** NCS Directive 3220, Flags in VA National Cemeteries.
5. **RESCISSIONS**
 - a. NCS M40-2, National Cemeteries - Administration, Operation and Maintenance, dated May 1, 1984, paragraphs:
 - (1) 3.05 - U. S. Flag and Cemetery Flag Pole
 - (2) 6.07 - Interment Flag
 - (3) 11.04 - Memorial Day Grave Decorating Flags
 - (4) 11.09 - Avenue of Flags
 - (5) 22.12 - Issuance of United States Flags Authorized for Burial or Memorial Purposes
 - b. NCS Administrative Issues:

DMA Circular 40-79-03 - Issuance of United States Flag for Burial or Memorial Purposes, May 7, 1979
 - c. NCS Policy Letters:
 - (1) Quality Control of Interment Flags, October 1, 1990
 - (2) United States Flags in the National Cemetery System, July 1, 1991
 - (3) Flying of the POW/MIA Flag in National Cemeteries, July 6, 1992
 - (4) Display of the POW/MIA Flag in National Cemeteries, October 7, 1992

Jerry W. Bowen
Director, National Cemetery System

FLAGS IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

USE OF FLAGS

1	FLAG ETIQUETTE AND DISPLAY.....	1
2	PRIMARY UNITED STATES FLAG.....	1
3	MEMORIAL FLAGS.....	2
4	AVENUE OF FLAGS.....	2
5	GRAVE DECORATING FLAGS.....	3
6	THE FLAG OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA (CSA).....	4
7	THE LEAGUE OF FAMILIES' POW/MIA FLAG.....	4

USE OF FLAGS

1. FLAG ETIQUETTE AND DISPLAY

- a. Respect will be demonstrated at all times for the United States flag, the VA's Distinguishing flag and other flags authorized for public display at national cemeteries through appropriate handling, storage, display and disposition in accordance with the Federal Flag Code (Public Law 94-344), title 38 United States Code, section 2403(c), and title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, sections 1.9 and 1.10.
- b. Primary flags authorized for public display in national cemeteries are the United States flag, the VA's Distinguishing flag, State flags, the POW/MIA flag and, under limited circumstances, the Confederate flag.
- c. Certain other flags, pennants and guidon banners may be displayed at the discretion of the Cemetery Director for special occasions so long as they are of an honorable military, civic or service symbolism. Examples of these are the Medal of Honor flag, the Buffalo Soldiers guidon, military ship and unit flags (often displayed at wreath laying ceremonies), Senior flag and General Officer flags (usually displayed during a visit), and flags commemorating certain national historic events.
- d. Service Organization and Military Department flags may be appropriately displayed for special occasions. These flags may also be placed in the administration building, along with the United States flag, as a static display.
- e. Foreign National flags may be displayed under certain circumstances such as visitation by a Head-of-State. The graves of foreign prisoners of war may be decorated with their respective Foreign National flag for authorized ceremonies conducted by their countrymen or government officials.
- f. All flags, pennants and guidon banners will be displayed appropriately and always subordinate to the United States flag.

2. PRIMARY UNITED STATES FLAG

- a. Each national cemetery will display an all-weather United States flag on the main flagpole each day of the year during the hours the cemetery is open, but not to exceed the hours of daylight. Cemeteries having an appropriately illuminated flagpole may display the flag during non-daylight hours so long as the flag is illuminated between the hours of sunset and sunrise.
- b. Cemetery personnel will display the United States flag on Memorial Day at half staff until noon, at which time it will be raised to full staff. The flag may also be flown at half staff when otherwise authorized or by Presidential proclamation to commemorate the death of distinguished citizens, or each December 7 in honor of the individuals who died as a result of their service at Pearl Harbor.
- c. Cemetery personnel will bring the United States flag to half staff one-half hour before the start of the first committal service and raise it to full staff one-half hour after the conclusion of the last committal service each day.
- d. No other flag will be routinely displayed subordinate to (below) the United States flag on the main flagpole.

3. MEMORIAL FLAGS

- a. 38 CFR 1.10 governs eligibility for and disposition of the United States flag for burial purposes. General information related to memorial flags is found in VA Pamphlet 27-75-1, United States Flag for Burial or Memorial Purposes.
- b. Cemetery Directors should ensure that each casket and urn containing the remains of an eligible veteran delivered to a national cemetery for burial is accompanied by an appropriately displayed United States flag, unless the primary next of kin or, if none, the party responsible for the burial wishes otherwise.
- c. Memorial flags may be obtained by next of kin on behalf of eligible veterans through application using VA Form 2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes. Memorial flags are issued by VA facilities, including national cemeteries, and most U. S. post offices. Each national cemetery should maintain an adequate supply of VA Forms 2008, for use by the public in applying for the issuance of a memorial flag.
- d. Each national cemetery will maintain a supply of memorial flags which is adequate to meet its needs. Order memorial flags (VA Stock Number 8345-00-656-1432) through established supply channels using VA Form 90-2237, Request, Turn-In and Receipt for Property or Services. Memorial flags are issued in accordance with guidance provided in VA Pamphlet 27-75-1, and their distribution is accountable.
- e. Usually, remains arriving at the cemetery for burial are accompanied by a memorial flag. When remains arrive at the cemetery unaccompanied by a memorial flag, and the responsible party desires a flag, it will be issued by the national cemetery upon application. When remains of deceased active duty military personnel are consigned directly to the cemetery, but were inadvertently shipped without an accompanying memorial flag, the cemetery will provide a flag without application.
- f. Cemetery personnel will inspect all memorial flags that accompany remains to assure that they are free of defects. Defective flags will be replaced with cemetery stock and turned in through established supply procedures for stock replenishment.
- g. Cemetery personnel will assure that the memorial flag which drapes a casket or is displayed with an urn containing cremated remains is displayed in accordance with the flag code and appropriately presented.

4. AVENUE OF FLAGS

- a. An Avenue of Flags is the flying of many United States flags usually arrayed on both sides of the principal drive leading from the main entrance into the cemetery. In newly constructed national cemeteries and other cemeteries where appropriate, the Avenue of Flags is the primary display of respect for the service performed by our Nation's veterans, and replaces the decorating of individual graves with flags on Memorial Day.
- b. United States flags used in the Avenue of Flags are memorial flags issued to honor deceased veterans which are then donated by the next of kin to the cemetery for display. Cemetery Directors must make it clear to the donor that these flags become the property of VA, and that the donation is unconditional. Loaned flags new memorial flags drawn from stock will not be used for display in the Avenue of Flags. The extent of the Avenue of Flags at each cemetery is determined by the number of serviceable memorial flags available, and the program scope that can be readily managed by the cemetery's staff.
- c. When a memorial flag donation has been accepted, the donor will be presented a prepared VA Form 40-4998, Certificate of Appreciation (Avenue of Flags Program), by the Cemetery Director. This certificate should be prepared in a manner which renders it suitable for presentation and display. When practical, the certificate should be presented in person. When this is not practical, the certificate should be mailed to the donor along with an appropriate, but brief, cover letter signed by the Cemetery Director. The certificate and letter should be packaged in a manner that offers protection from damage during shipment.
- d. Where Avenues of Flags are authorized and implemented, they are displayed on Memorial Day, Veterans Day and other appropriate special occasions such as Flag Day and Independence Day when weather permits. The wishes of local service and civic organizations are considered in determining on which special occasions to display the Avenue of Flags.
- e. To the extent that it can be promoted, the Avenue of Flags will be supplied, installed, maintained, erected and taken down through voluntary donation of time and labor by local service and civic organizations, school groups and other interested parties.
- f. Flag staffs used to display the Avenue of Flags will be sufficient in size and strength to adequately and appropriately display a standard memorial flag. Flag staffs are secured by insertion into an in-ground receptacle, usually spaced about 20 feet apart (6m), so passing vehicles or pedestrians cannot interfere with the flag.

5. GRAVE DECORATING FLAGS

- a. At many national cemeteries, each grave is decorated with a small United States flag on Memorial Day. This practice will be continued at these cemeteries except where substitution of an Avenue of Flags is strongly favored by the local veteran community, and where discontinuation would not impact negatively on the National Cemetery System (NCS). Efforts to discontinue the practice of decorating graves with individual flags may be initiated only with the prior approval of the Director, Office of Field Operations, and with the direct involvement of Field Programs and Public and Consumer Affairs Service staffs.
- b. Grave decorating flags will be displayed only on Memorial Day each year. A Grave Decorating Flag Program will not be implemented at newly constructed national cemeteries or at cemeteries where display of the Avenue of Flags is the traditional method of arraying United States flags on Memorial Day.
- c. United States flags used to decorate graves are acquired at Government expense through established procurement procedures. Cemetery Directors will maintain an adequate stock of serviceable flags to decorate graves in the cemetery. It is important that these flags are protected from damage and properly stored to maximize their useful life.
- d. Flags will be placed on graves in a uniform manner, usually 1 foot (0.304 m) in front of and centered on the headstone or marker. When required by the number of graves to be decorated and available labor, graves may be decorated the day before Memorial Day and flags removed the day after Memorial Day. This will result in illuminated flags in place during non-daylight hours; however, this is an authorized deviation from the flag code made necessary by logistics.
- e. Cemetery Directors will actively promote voluntary assistance from local service and civic organizations, Boy and Girl Scouts, other groups, and interested citizens in placing and removing grave decorating flags. Volunteers will be supervised to the extent possible to assure that flags are treated with dignity and respect, and are properly placed. Cemetery personnel will accomplish flag related work that cannot be done with volunteer assistance.
- f. After removal and before storage, flags will be inspected, dried, if necessary, and culled to remove those that are unserviceable. Unserviceable flags will be disposed of appropriately. After inventorying serviceable flags, placements will be ordered to assure that an adequate supply of flags will be on hand when needed. Flags will be stored in a dignified manner out of public view.

6. THE FLAG OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA (CSA)

a. The flag of the Confederate States of America (CSA) will be displayed in national cemeteries only to represent respect for those decedents who served in the armies of the CSA during the Civil War. As such, the display of the Confederate flag is limited to small individual grave flags displayed on Memorial Day and, in States where it is officially observed, Confederate Memorial Day.

b. The display of the Confederate flag in national cemeteries is allowed only under the sponsorship of a local service or historic organization. The stock of Confederate flags for display in national cemeteries will be maintained through donation by the sponsoring organization. Confederate flags may not be purchased with Government funds. On occasions when they are displayed, Confederate flags will be placed and removed with volunteer labor organized, provided and supervised by the sponsoring organization.

c. The Confederate flag is to be subordinate to the United States flag in size and prominence of display. When displayed on graves in conjunction with the United States flag on Memorial Day, Confederate flags are placed 3 feet (0.91 m) in front of and centered on the headstone of deceased Confederate veterans. When displayed without the presence of the United States flag, as may be done on Confederate Memorial Day, the Confederate flag is placed 1 foot (0.30 m) in front of and centered on the headstone of deceased Confederate veterans.

7. THE LEAGUE OF FAMILIES' POW/MIA FLAG

a. The official League of Families' POW/MIA flag is authorized for display in national cemeteries. The POW/MIA flag is displayed during daylight hours at all national cemeteries on Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The flag may be flown more frequently, or daily, at cemeteries where its display is promoted and supported by local interest groups.

b. The POW/MIA flag is not displayed subordinate to the United States flag at the cemetery's main flag pole. It is displayed on a separate flag pole erected in a location to exhibit appropriate respect for the flag.

c. When displayed only on mandatory occasions, the POW/MIA flag may be flown from a flag staff similar to those used in Avenues of Flags. At cemeteries where local interest has promoted more frequent or daily display of the POW/MIA flag, a permanent flagpole dedicated solely to that use may be installed. Local interest groups and organizations are encouraged to provide input on their preferred location of this flagpole on cemetery grounds; however, the Cemetery Director, in coordination with the NCAO Director, will make the final decision on its location.

INDEX

A

All-weather United States flag, 1
Avenue of Flags, 2, 3, 4

B

Buffalo Soldiersguidon, 1

C

Confederate flag, 1, 4
Confederate Memorial Day, 4

D

Defective flags, 2
Display, 1
Disposition, 1

E

F

Federal Flag Code, 1
Flag Day, 3
Flag staffs, 3
Foreign National flags, 1

G

General Officer flags, 1
Grave Decorating Flag Program, 3
Grave decorating flags, 3

H

Handling, 1

I

Illuminated flagpole, 1
Independence Day, 3
Individual flags, 3
Individual grave flags, 4

J

K

L

League of Families' POW/MIA flag, 4
Loaned flags, 2

M

Medal of Honor flag, 1
Memorial Day, 2, 3, 4
Memorial flag donation, 2
Memorial flags, 2
Military ship and unit flags, 1

N

National POW/MIA Recognition Day, 4
New memorial flags, 2

O

P

Pennants and guidon banners, 1
POW/MIA flag, 1, 4
Presidential proclamation, 1

Q

R

Replacements, 3

S

Senior flag, 1
Service Organization and Military Department flags, 1
Serviceable flags, 3
State flags, 1
Storage, 1

T

Thirty-Eight, CFR, section 1.9 , 1
Thirty-Eight, CFR, section 1,10, 1, 2

U

Unilluminated flags, 3
United States flag, 1, 3, 4
United States flags, 2
Unserviceable flags, 3

V

VA's Distinguishing flag, 1
Veterans Day, 3, 4
Volunteers, 3

W

X

Y

Z